

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

April 20, 2020

The Honorable Greg Ibach
Undersecretary
United States Department of Agriculture
1400 Independence Ave., S.W.
Washington, D.C. 20250

Dear Undersecretary Ibach:

I am writing to express my concern over the potential implications of two recent United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) decisions. In the short period of time since these announcements, I have heard from numerous growers, farmers, and constituents about the unintended consequences that may arise.

First, the USDA Agriculture Market Service recently announced it would temporarily waive Country of Origin Labeling (“COOL”) enforcement against the retail sale of commodities that lack an appropriate country of origin or method of production labeling. This announcement may harm demand for American products. As you know, COVID-19 has wreaked havoc on the U.S. commodities markets. Many growers across the state of Georgia are faced with crippling demand shortages at a critical time when their crops are ready to be harvested.

I understand that this enforcement waiver is intended to provide flexibility for distributors to redirect food from restaurants – where COOL is not required – to sales to retail grocery stores where demand for certain agricultural products has increased. However, demand within grocery stores has also shifted dramatically as a result of changes in shopping habits associated with stay at home orders and social distancing. While demand has sharply risen for some commodities, it has dramatically decreased for others. Additionally, I worry that a lack of enforcement could be exploited by some retailers seeking to disguise imported commodities as domestic commodities. In light of these concerns, I ask that you consider narrowing the waiver to only apply to commodities for which demand exceeds the domestic supply.

Second, I am concerned with the Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service’s recent decision to authorize the importation of fresh citrus from China. While I understand that these regulations have been in progress for some time in connection with foreign trade agreements, the COVID-19 pandemic has shown us all firsthand that we cannot trust the word of the Chinese government.

This approval specifically relies on the Chinese government to enforce protocols for eliminating the risk that imported Chinese citrus could carry plant pests and other quarantined species. As China’s early coverup of the COVID-19 outbreak and their continued lies about its origin have

proven, the Chinese government cannot be trusted to act in the best interest of public health. As such, I ask that you reconsider permitting imports of Chinese citrus and, at a minimum, put systems in place to independently verify the safety of any citrus imported from China.

I want to thank you and your colleagues at United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) for your work on behalf of our nation in the midst of this pandemic. During this unprecedented time, it is critical that agencies and elected officials work together to protect and uplift America's hardworking farmers who continue to work tirelessly to put food on our tables. I hope that the USDA will take the concerns of farmers and growers across America into consideration while implementing these new policies and regulations.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Doug Collins", written over a horizontal line.

Doug Collins
Member of Congress